

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF OHIO
WESTERN DIVISION AT DAYTON**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Plaintiff,

:

Case No. 1:02-cr-157 (3)

Also 1:07-cv-594

-vs-

District Judge Susan J. Dlott

Magistrate Judge Michael R. Merz

:

STEVEN M. RENNICK, SR.,

Defendant.

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON CERTIFICATE OF APPEALABILITY

This case is before the Court on Defendant Steven M. Rennick, Sr.'s, Motion for Certificate of Appealability (Doc. No. 304). The Motion was filed and served April 24, 2009. under S. D. Ohio Civ. R. 7.2, any response was required to be filed not later than May 18, 2009, but the United States has not filed a response.

A person seeking to appeal an adverse ruling in the district court on a petition for writ of habeas corpus or on a § 2255 motion to vacate must obtain a certificate of appealability before proceeding. 28 U.S.C. §2253 as amended by the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (Pub. L. No 104-132, 110 Stat. 1214)(the "AEDPA"), provides in pertinent part:

(c)

(1) Unless a circuit justice or judge issues a certificate of appealability, an appeal may not be taken to the court of appeals from--

(A) the final order in a habeas corpus proceeding in which the detention complained of arises out of process issued by a State court;
or

(B) the final order in a proceeding under section 2255.

(2) A certificate of appealability may issue under paragraph (1) only if the applicant has made a substantial showing of the denial of a constitutional right.

(3) The certificate of appealability under paragraph (1) shall indicate which specific issue or issues satisfy the showing required by paragraph (2).

District courts have the power to issue certificates of appealability under the AEDPA in §2254 cases. *Lyons v. Ohio Adult Parole Authority*, 105 F.3d 1063 (6th Cir. 1997); *Hunter v. United States*, 101 F.3d 1565 (11th Cir. 1996)(en banc). Likewise, district courts are to be the initial decisionmakers on certificates of appealability under §2255. *Kincade v. Sparkman*, 117 F.3d 949 (6th Cir. 1997)(adopting analysis in *Lozada v. United States*, 107 F.3d 1011, 1017 (2d Cir. 1997). Issuance of blanket grants or denials of certificates of appealability is error, particularly if done before the petitioner requests a certificate. *Porterfield v. Bell*, 258 F.3d 484(6th Cir. 2001); *Murphy v. Ohio*, 263 F.3d 466 (6th Cir. 2001).

To obtain a certificate of appealability, a petitioner must show at least that “jurists of reason would find it debatable whether the petition states a valid claim of denial of a constitutional right.” *Slack v. McDaniel*, 529 U.S. 473, 484 (2000). That is, it must find that reasonable jurists would find the district court’s assessment of the petitioner’s constitutional claims debatable or wrong or because they warrant encouragement to proceed further. *Banks v. Dretke*, 540 U.S. 668, 705 (2004); *Miller-El v. Cockrell*, 537 U.S. 322, 336 (2003). If the district court dismisses the petition on procedural grounds without reaching the constitutional questions, the petitioner must also show that jurists of reason would find it debatable whether the district court was correct in its procedural ruling. *Slack*, 529 U.S. at 484, 120 S. Ct. at 1604. The procedural issue should be decided first so as to avoid unnecessary constitutional rulings. *Slack*, 529 U.S. at 485, citing *Ashwander v. TVA*, 297 U.S. 288, 347 (1936)(Brandeis, J., concurring). The first part of this test is equivalent to making a substantial showing of the denial of a constitutional right, including showing that reasonable jurists could

debate whether the petition should have been resolved in a different manner or that the issues presented were adequate to deserve encouragement to proceed further, *Slack v. McDaniel*, 529 U.S. 473 at 484, 120 S. Ct. 1595, 1604, 146 L. Ed. 2d 542 (2000), quoting *Barefoot v. Estelle*, 463 U.S. 880, 893 (1983). The relevant holding in *Slack* is as follows:

[W]hen the district court denies a habeas petition on procedural grounds without reaching the prisoner's underlying constitutional claim, a COA should issue (and an appeal of the district court's order may be taken) if the prisoner shows, at least, that jurists of reason would find it debatable whether the petition states a valid claim of the denial of a constitutional right, and that jurists of reason would find it debatable whether the district court was correct in its procedural ruling.

529 U.S. at 478.

The standard is higher than the absence of frivolity required to permit an appeal to proceed *in forma pauperis*. *Id.* at 893.

Obviously the petitioner need not show that he should prevail on the merits... Rather, he must demonstrate that the issues are debatable among jurists of reason; that a court could resolve the issues [in a different manner]; or that the questions are 'adequate to deserve encouragement to proceed further.'

Id. n.4. *Accord, Miller-El v. Cockrell*, 537 U.S. 322, 123 S. Ct. 1029, 1039-1040, 154 L.Ed.2d 931 (2003). A certificate of appealability is not to be issued pro forma or as a matter of course. *Id.* at 1040. Rather, the district and appellate courts must differentiate between those appeals deserving attention and those which plainly do not. *Id.* A blanket certificate of appealability for all claims is improper, even in a capital case. *Frazier v. Huffman*, 348 F.3d 174 (6th Cir. 2003), citing *Porterfield v. Bell*, 258 F.3d 484 (6th Cir. 2001).

Defendant seeks a certificate on the following two issues:

1. Defendant was coerced into pleading guilty by the prosecution's offer of a "package deal";

2. Rennick received ineffective assistance of counsel in pleading guilty.

(Motion, Doc. No. 304).

While the Magistrate Judge continues to believe his recommended resolution of those issues, later adopted by the Court, was correct, he agrees with Defendant that they are debatable among reasonable jurists. The amount of analysis they required and the fact that an evidentiary hearing was needed to decide this matter support that conclusion as does the failure of the United States to oppose the Motion.

Accordingly, it is respectfully recommended that the Court issue a certificate of appealability on the two requested issues.

May 23, 2009.

s/ **Michael R. Merz**
United States Magistrate Judge

NOTICE REGARDING OBJECTIONS

Pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b), any party may serve and file specific, written objections to the proposed findings and recommendations within ten days after being served with this Report and Recommendations. Pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(e), this period is automatically extended to thirteen days (excluding intervening Saturdays, Sundays, and legal holidays) because this Report is being served by one of the methods of service listed in Fed. R. Civ. P. 5(b)(2)(B), (C), or (D) and may be extended further by the Court on timely motion for an extension. Such objections shall specify the portions of the Report objected to and shall be accompanied by a memorandum of law in support of the objections. If the Report and Recommendations are based in whole or in part upon matters occurring of record at an oral hearing, the objecting party shall promptly arrange for the transcription of the record, or such portions of it as all parties may agree upon or the Magistrate Judge deems sufficient, unless the assigned District Judge otherwise directs. A party may respond to another party's objections within ten days after being served with a copy thereof. Failure to make objections in accordance with this procedure may forfeit rights on appeal. *See United States v. Walters*, 638 F. 2d 947 (6th Cir., 1981); *Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140, 106 S. Ct. 466, 88 L. Ed. 2d 435 (1985).